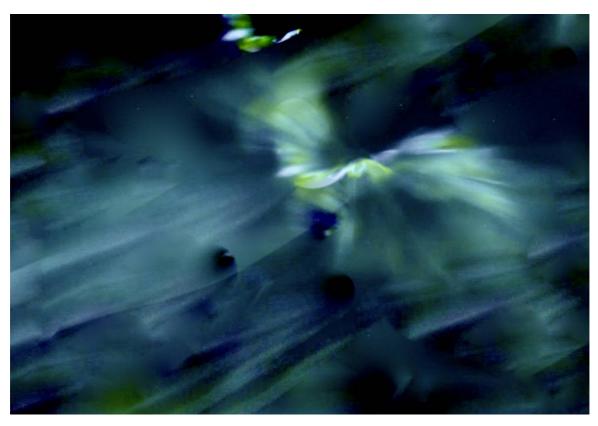




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ALESSANDRO SBORDONI 2024-03-16

SEMIOTICS OF THE END: THE BACKROOMS

MASHINES INTERNET, NOCLIP, SEMIOTICS, THE END

On October 12, 1492, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus landed on the American continent. On July 20, 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong first walked on the Moon. On May 12, 2019, an anonymous user noclipped "out of reality" and ended up in the Backrooms. After Christopher Columbus' pillars of Hercules and Neil Armstrong's Kármán line, the threshold of the Backrooms represents now the furthest *end* of the world.

At 10:07 PM on the 12th of May 2019, the anonymous user replied to a picture in a thread on 4chan's /x/ section. The image, posted in response to a call to "post disquieting images that just feel 'off'" on imageboard website 4chan, depicted an empty office space with yellowish wallpaper and neon lighting.

In reply to the creepy image, the anonymous user wrote: "If you're not careful and you noclip out of reality in the wrong areas, you'll end up in the Backrooms, where it's nothing but the stink of old moist carpet, the madness of mono-yellow, the endless background noise of fluorescent lights at maximum hum-buzz, and approximately six hundred million square miles of randomly segmented empty rooms to be trapped in."

Four years after the anonymous 4chan post, 3D models of empty office spaces and shopping centers are reproduced endlessly by Internet users on Reddit, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In analogy with the United States flag erected on the surface of the Moon, the green wallpaper and neon lights represent the reproduction of capitalism into the imaginary.



The dreams of the end are over. Yet, the nightmares never end. As the comments posted below the eerie images of the Backrooms also show, many people have been dreaming about places like the Backrooms much before the original 4chan post. It is hard not to think about Carl Gustav Jung's blood-filled dreams and visions of war, a few months before the beginning of WWI. The exception is that, today, the collective unconscious has taken the form of collective informatization. Nightmares have taken the form of zeros and ones.

Kane Pixels' footage from the Backrooms also feature a tripod-looking monster, known as Bacteria: the living form of the image itself, the viral structure of the hyperreal. It is the representation of everything that, logically, wants our death.

Noclipping

Above all, it is the closure of the system that produces fascination. As Jean Baudrillard writes in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*: "What fascinates us is always that which radically excludes us in the name of its internal logic or perfection: a mathematical formula, a paranoic system, a concrete jungle, a useless object..." not to forget the capitalist system and the Kabbalistic conception of God. This is also the fascination that authors like Nick Land and Mark Fisher developed for capitalism: an abstract system that *does not need you*.

The Backrooms are a closed system that is accessed by some fatal error: Internet's hell. Again,

in opposition to other liminal spaces, there is no exit. "The Backrooms are the result of a threshold that has glitched and keeps on self-generating in a seemingly unstoppable loop." It is noteworthy that the Backrooms went viral during the COVID-19 pandemic: yet another liminal space that takes place in both space and time and reproduces itself endlessly in accordance with the logic of virality.

"When the concept of threshold," the *limen* in liminal spaces, "meets that of noclip, a simple boundary line can turn into a habitable place. The glitching threshold might lengthen to generate a space, and this space could switch from a transitory moment into a permanent prison."⁴

To noclip and get out of the gaming space of capitalism, then. In addition to images and video, the Backrooms are further accessed through simulation video games where players are able to explore and interact with the surroundings. To noclip away from empty offices and shopping centers into what are now only bleak spaces. "No clipping through reality" reads the intertitle of a simulation video game of the Backrooms.

Noclip through the hyperreal. Exit the gaming space and its hyperrealism. Enter noclip mode. *Collision detection* is disabled. The player is altogether outside of the authorized map and within the same gaming space: the code-cheaters are always already more than players and non-players. There is no difference between function and error anymore. All that was closed by function is now opened to critical errors. Follow the bugs after the end of the world. Noclip into *another* map. The critical race to whatever is after the end. That is the fascination of the closed system against the allure of the open system.

Later, the *error* is fixed. The software is debugged. A new patch is installed. The command line is shut down. The imaginary is returned to the reproduction of more signs. Restart. Try again. Find a new cartography.

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NOTES

1 Compare with Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Third Unconscious: The Psychosphere in the Viral Age*.

- 2 Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, p. 96.
- 3 Valentina Tanni, "A Journey in the Back of the World in Noclip Mode".
- 4 Valentina Tanni, "A Journey in the Back of the World in Noclip Mode".

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